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Renda, Ana Isabel; da Costa Mendes, Júlio; Oom do Valle, Patrícia
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A STRUCTURAL MODEL APPROACH OF RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TOURISM IMPACTS IN THEIR OWN QUALITY OF LIFE: THE MUNICIPALITY OF LOULÉ, ALGARVE

Ana Isabel Renda

PhD Student, Assistant Professor at ESGHT, University of the Algarve, Portugal

arend@ualg.pt

Júlio da Costa Mendes

PhD, Assistant Professor at Faculty of Economics, University of the Algarve, Portugal

jmendes@ualg.pt

Patrícia Oom do Valle

PhD, Assistant Professor at Faculty of Economics, University of the Algarve, Portugal

pvalle@ualg.pt

ABSTRACT

This study presents a structural equation model with eight latent variables and a set of research hypotheses to be tested. The model has been designed to measure the relationships between residents' tourism impact perceptions and their global perception of quality of life.

The research aims to assess how residents' tourism impact perceptions influence the residents' quality of life perceptions, and to verify if the level of tourism development in the residence area influences this relationship.

This paper presents the model, how data have been collected with a sample of 1050 residents of the municipality of Loulé, in the Algarve and the expected results.

KEYWORDS

Tourism Impacts, Quality of Life, Well-being, Residents, Tourism Development, Structural Equation Modelling.

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research is threefold. Firstly, to assess how residents perceive tourism impacts. Secondly, to critically examine the influence of tourism impacts on the perception of residents' quality of life. Thirdly, to verify how the level of tourism development in the residence area influences the relationship between the perception of tourism impacts and the perceptions of residents' quality of life.

The study proposes a structural equation model to measure this relationship, among eight latent variables, expressed through a set of research hypotheses to be tested. This paper seeks to present the model, how data will be collected and the expected results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study proposes a structural equation model to measure various relationships, among eight latent variables: global perception on tourism impact; perception on impact on economic, social, cultural and environmental tourism; global perception of quality of life; perception of life satisfaction and perception of happiness. Those latent variables are described by indicators according to the objectives of the research and result from an extended literature review, namely studies such as those of Andereck et al (2007), Cummins (1997), Diener (1995) Gursoy & Rutherford (2004), Kim (2002), Ko & Stewart (2002), Moscardo (2009), Perdue et al (1999), Vargas-Sánchez et al (2009), William & Lawson (2001).

The model will test the following effects: direct effect of global perceived tourism impacts on global perceived quality of life; the indirect effect of global perceived tourism impacts on global perceived quality of life, through life satisfaction and happiness (material, health and security and emotional and community well-being, respectively); the direct effect of perceived economic, social, cultural and environmental perceived tourism impacts on global perception of tourism impacts; the direct effect of global life satisfaction perception and of global happiness perception on the global perceived quality of life. The study tests also the moderator effect of tourism development in the relationship between perceived tourism impacts and perceived quality of life.

Data analysis methods will include confirmatory factor analysis, to ensure the reliability and validity of the used indicators and uses the software Partial Least Squares (PLS) which draws the model in a very intuitive diagram form, simultaneously allowing to specify to and to estimate the relationships among variables, including the formulated hypotheses.

3. METHODOLOGY

This investigation adopts a mixed-methods research, comprising a qualitative exploratory study followed by a quantitative research approach. The exploratory study uses the triangulation methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation in the study area and the collection of existing documents and information, to better understand the complexity and diversity of the municipality under study. The fieldwork is based on a quantitative research approach by the application of a structured and detailed questionnaire, designed according to the literature review and to the exploratory study results.

The questionnaire is sequentially organized in several parts according to the research objectives: part 1 presents some pre-selecting questions, as the survey is only intended to be applied to residents in the municipality of Loulé, of Portuguese nationality; part 2 comprises questions related to quality of life, life satisfaction, happiness and well-being; part 3 relates to tourism impact perception; in part 4 residents are asked about their level of interaction with tourists. Finally, part 5 presents questions about personal information. The questionnaire was designed taking into consideration clarity of language and explicitness and most questions rely on a five-point Likert scale.

A stratified sample of 1050 residents of the municipality of Loulé was surveyed to test the conceptual model. The questionnaire was applied during the winter 2011, to obtain information from the residents not constrained by the presence of tourists during the high season. Due to differences in the population geographic distribution (between the coast and the inland) and the different tourism development stages within the area, the survey took place in the eleven parishes of the municipality, distributed by the three main areas of the Algarve region – Litoral, Barrocal and Serra.

4. MAIN RESULTS

This study is an important contribution to the literature due four reasons: firstly it adopts the perspective of residents, a point of view often overlooked in the literature; secondly it discusses the concepts of quality of life and well-being not yet consensually defined; thirdly it attempts to establish the relationship between tourism impacts and the residents perception of quality of life, a quite unexplored issue; fourthly, it proposes a useful model that could become a tool for decision makers and investors for a sustainable tourism planning, regarding the perception of tourism on quality of life.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to show that tourism development contributes to improve residents' quality of life and that, in general, residents perceive tourism as causing positive impacts on their quality of life, while recognizing also negative effects, namely those related to emotional and community well-being.

Important differences in the residents' perception of tourism impact and in their perceived quality of life, according to the tourism development level of the residence area, are most probably to occur.

The fact that this study represents a particular perspective as it was only applied to a limited area in the Algarve tourism destination, may consist in the study's main limitation. Therefore, it is essential to adapt the model to the particular circumstances of other tourist destinations. Furthermore, it would be enriching to conduct the same research during the high season to assess whether the perceptions of residents are different while in the continuous presence of tourists. It would also be extremely useful to conduct longitudinal studies that would capture the changing perceptions of residents as a result of tourism development.

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